

Reinventing Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd

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* Since its establishment the Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd has had a limited but useful impact – way beyond its resources.

Over the last 12 months we have:

1. Established a dialogue of responsiveness with United Energy.
2. Established SEC News with two issues published and a third due.
3. Joined the Purchasing Victoria Co-operative Ltd and succeeded in having a director elected to the board.
4. Developed a specialist interest in renewable energy.
5. Continued our support of the Co-operative Federation of Victoria Ltd and Co-operative Energy Ltd
6. Printed 1000 copies of a membership recruitment leaflet.
7. Initiated Cr. Mark Conroy's queries regarding United Energy blackouts and maintenance programs in Frankston.
8. Met 16 times, including the AGM and the adjourned meeting, during 1997 – compared with three times in 1996 and six times in 1995.

The co-operative's strength is its dwindling band of directors which has experienced a high turnover. From tonight four directors remain. Lois Wishart's departure as a director is the sixth since the co-operative's formation in 1995:

Steve Timms
Bridget Croft
Maria Imrei
Phil Tenni
John Neve

It is a depressing turnover.

The number of members who have elected to subscribe to the SEC News is seven:

Directors	Non-directors
A.R. Gourley	Lois Wishart
David Griffiths	Des Ryan
Greg Wishart	Mark Conroy
Richard Greaves	

Even previous active directors have not subscribed to SEC News.

Under the new Model Rules a subscription to SEC News could be used as a criteria for active membership – requiring the expulsion of the remaining members.

We need to be realistic about our membership and directorial difficulties. Historically, the establishment, development and maintenance of co-operatives has been difficult until they establish a business presence which clearly Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd has not. Until then, the co-operatives have typically depended on a dedicated few.

Nonetheless, Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd needs to be relaunched – to re-establish itself with existing and prospective members.

The opportunity to relaunch could be the Annual General Meeting and the adoption of new Rules. This would also provide the basis for expelling all members who choose to remain inactive and, therefore, restore integrity to our membership list.

There are promising developments that could provide the basis for establishing a business presence for Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd. Although this could take up to 12 months to consolidate, we would know by July 1998 whether they are realistic. These concern the activities of Co-operative Energy Ltd in establishing a Co-opEnergy Purchasing Group. The co-operative is involved in three sets of negotiations:

Aged Care Victoria – 400 members

Purchasing Victoria Co-operative Ltd – 170 members

Rural Industries Co-operative Ltd – 310 members

The superficial basis for a successful relaunch of Southern Energy Co-operative Ltd is a well-attended AGM – including a quorum. This will have self-reinforcing consequences for the co-operative.

Preparation. Pre-meeting preparation is crucial and this includes direct contact with existing members and local media coverage of the AGM. This could include leafleting small business/

Interest. We need to capture interest in the meeting and this means marketing the meeting in a way that members and non-members believe that they would benefit from attending. Of course, it is more than the belief of members and non-members. We must believe it also. Most importantly, our focus must be on actual benefits – rather than perceived. We are concerned with substance.

I would suggest that the focus of the AGM, therefore, could be as follows: The electricity con – How electricity deregulation is conning small consumers and what we can do about it. The talk would be practical – focussing on how to make, and not lose, money in the deregulated electricity market, what to look out for and the options.